



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Protecting the innocent is their mission

Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect awards outstanding Hampton Roads advocates

Richmond, VA — The Commonwealth recognizes April as Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month, but for many, protecting children is their mission year round:

- a Chesapeake attorney who makes himself available 24 hours a day to represent the abused;
- a Norfolk pediatrician who works to raise the standards for other physicians;
- and an 80-year-old Virginia Beach woman who has been a child advocate for more than four decades

The Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect Awards recognize Virginians who have exhibited a strong commitment to advocacy, protection, prevention, treatment and assistance.

"It is an honor and a privilege to recognize the men and women who champion the safety and security of our children," said Governor Timothy Kaine. "Their focus on prevention is especially critical."

The Governor's Advisory Board (GAB) presented Certificate of Appreciation Awards to outstanding child advocates at this year's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month Conference in Richmond on April 2.

Of the six recipients this year, three are from Southside Hampton Roads:

- **Suzanne P. Starling, MD, Norfolk**, medical director of the child abuse program with the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters (CHKD): As a pediatrician, Dr. Starling is a dedicated advocate for children, treating thousands who have suffered at the hands of adults, providing expert testimony in court, serving on numerous investigative teams and working to raise the standards for pediatricians treating abused and neglected children. Starling founded the Forensic Pediatric Fellowship program at CHKD and serves on the boards of the American Board of Pediatrics and the State Child Fatality team.

- **John Oliver, Chesapeake**, counsel for human services with the City Attorney's Office: Oliver has helped transform and improve the lives of thousands; his cases range from those involving child abuse and neglect to foster care reviews to adult protection to guardianship for the elderly. He makes himself available 24-hours a day, including on weekends, holidays and vacations, to assist the innocent. Oliver is a former chair of GAB and has served with numerous legislative committees and advocacy groups.
- **Mary Russo, Virginia Beach**, volunteer: Russo will celebrate her 81st birthday in June and has dedicated more than 40 years to advocating for children and families. Russo single-handedly initiated the First Steps program in Hampton Roads. As the City of Virginia Beach's Volunteer Coordinator, she has inspired more than 23,000 people to volunteer nearly 1.4 million hours, valued at more than \$16 million annually. In recent years, Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf proclaimed May 18 as "Mary Russo Day" in honor of this advocate's volunteerism and commitment to children.

The awards and conference were sponsored by the Virginia Department of Social Services and Prevent Child Abuse Virginia and co-sponsored by the Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, the Family and Children's Trust Fund, the Child Abuse Prevention Committee and the Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Home Office is located in Richmond and administers social services programs, consistent with federal and state law and policy of the State Board of Social Services through 120 local departments of social services (LDSS) throughout the state. The VDSS mission is "People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse, and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities."

For more information, go to:

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov>

<http://www.preventchildabuseva.org>

<http://www.fact.state.va.us>

http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/prevention_month.cgi

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/index.html>

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/CitizenServices/ConstituentServices/Proclamations/2007/ChildAbusePrevMonth.cfm>

<http://pediatrics.evms.edu/Faculty/Starling.htm>

<http://pediatrics.evms.edu/Divisions/ForensicPediatrics.htm>

<http://www.citizencorps.gov/citizenCorps/councilDisplay.do?id=613&parentNavId=null>

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Attached are photos of John Oliver, Mary Russo and Dr. Suzanne Starling. Interviews and additional photos are available upon request. For additional story ideas and for information on how your media outlet can help raise awareness of child abuse, neglect and prevention, please contact Carla Harris, VDSS, (804) 726-7107 or carla.harris@dss.virginia.gov.